



Second Sunday in Lent Sunday, March 17th, 2019

Waiting: Rejecting Rhetoric!



Last Sunday we reflected upon the Temptations of Jesus, represented in the theological/political world view that “powers” conspire to make themselves absolute, despotic, tyrannous in reality and in our lives. This is a fundamental dimension of the way the Bible sees the world. In the story of the Temptations, these powers were ancient but also very contemporary: they were economics, religion and politics. Rather than reflect on these specifically, we thought about the way in which they operate, “press our buttons”, unleash something within us - our desire - that can be destructive. This impact that external powers have upon our human psyche, threatening to “disorder our attachments” or in contemporary parlance, “screw around with our balance and equilibrium”, is something that was as observable in Jesus’ day as it is today. In a time of growing alarm about our societies and our place within them, today’s readings have wisdom to offer.

OUR GATHERING

Welcome

In the name of God our Father and Mother
 In the name of the Son
 In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with
And also with you

Let's Sing: Love Divine (TiS 217, Hyfrydol, Charles Wesley)

Opening Prayers

This opening prayer flows from the Gospel reading for today. It addresses in a very simple way, the tragedy of Jerusalem: historically the fulcrum in the Middle East of conflict, where religious, economic and political power have all coalesced and conspired. For Christians in Lent, the execution of Jesus by these powers is not just a peripheral question, but one that demands that we read the world, and ourselves, with insight.

“Haiku for those who will not”

O, Jerusalem,
 greatest city of them all;
 most to be pitied.

The Pharisees warn,
 Get away from here, Jesus;
 Herod wants your life.

O, Jerusalem;
 entitlement and power,
 keenly defended.

The perfect venue
 for the killing of prophets,
 O, Jerusalem!

Jesus will return
 to the great city one day,

to meet destiny.
As a hen enfolds
her brood with protective wings,
so "I would love you".

Yet you would not come.
You made your choice;
I have done my best.

One day you'll see me,
One day you'll see me.

Amen

The Peace

SMG

Introduction

Lent Event

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Sayings about the Misuse and Good Use of Christian Belief

Often, when people feel threatened, they look inward, not in terms of introspection, but in terms of protecting one's own. And often, this nationalistic rhetoric, for better or for worse, starts from quotations of or references to the Bible. This nationalistic mindset can lead to something as aggressive as Manifest Destiny where settlers could destroy native peoples in order to claim what they believed was divinely ordained. Or as we will see in the lectionary texts for this week, it can be something as simple as, "If I wait, God will destroy my enemies."

Caralie Focht, PhD candidate in Hebrew Bible at Emory University, USA

If you have ever loved someone you could not protect, then you understand the depth of Jesus' lament. All you can do is open your arms. You cannot make anyone walk into them. Meanwhile, this is the most vulnerable posture in the world –wings spread, breast exposed — but if you mean what you say, then this is how you stand.

And a hen is what Jesus chooses, which — if you think about it — is pretty typical of him. He is always turning things upside down, so that children and peasants wind up on top while kings and scholars land on the bottom. He is always wrecking our expectations of how things should turn out by giving prizes to losers and paying the last first. So of course, he chooses a chicken, which is about as far from a fox as you can get. That way the options become very clear: you can live by licking your chops or you can die protecting the chicks.

Barbara Brown Taylor “As a Hen Gathers her Brood”

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

Ignatius of Loyola

Genesis 15:1-18 (New American Bible Revised Edition)

This is an important passage in the story of Genesis. It is the first account of the covenant made between God and Abraham (cf. Genesis 17 for the second account). There are several duplications and difficulties in the story which suggests that maybe Genesis 15 has been developed from more than one earlier story. For example, while it is night in v. 5, evening is only approaching in vv. 12 and 17. Abraham believes in v. 6 but doubts again in v. 8. God introduces himself twice in v. 1 and then in v. 7. Such matters suggest that there is a long history behind the present form of our story. The story falls into two parts, vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-20. In each part God introduces himself and Abraham responds. Both are concerned with the promise God has made to Abraham and how that will be fulfilled. In v 2-3 Abraham laments his lack of an heir and in v. 8 he requests a sign that he will inherit the promised land. In each case, God replies in a two-fold manner: with a further promise and a sign in vv. 4-5, and with a covenant and

an omen in vv. 9-10, 17-21 and vv. 11-16 respectively. The omen section in vv. 11-16, which is another speech by God interrupting the scene, is omitted from our reading this week.

¹Some time afterward, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Do not fear, Abram! I am your shield; I will make your reward very great.

²But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what can you give me, if I die childless and have only a servant of my household, Eliezer of Damascus?” ³Abram continued, “Look, you have given me no offspring, so a servant of my household will be my heir.” ⁴Then the word of the LORD came to him: No, that one will not be your heir; your own offspring will be your heir.⁵ He took him outside and said: Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so, he added, will your descendants be. ⁶Abram put his faith in the LORD, who attributed it to him as an act of righteousness.^[b]

⁷He then said to him: I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession. ⁸“Lord GOD,” he asked, “how will I know that I will possess it?” ⁹^[c]He answered him: Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon. ¹⁰He brought him all these, split them in two, and placed each half opposite the other; but the birds he did not cut up. ¹¹Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram scared them away. ¹²As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a great, dark dread descended upon him.

¹³^[d]Then the LORD said to Abram: Know for certain that your descendants will reside as aliens in a land not their own, where they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. ¹⁴But I will bring judgment on the nation they must serve, and after this they will go out with great wealth. ¹⁵You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace; you will be buried at a ripe old age. ¹⁶In the fourth generation^[e] your descendants will return here, for the wickedness of the Amorites is not yet complete.

¹⁷When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, which passed between those pieces. ¹⁸^[f]On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates.

Psalm 27

Hazel Ruskin

The beginning of Psalm 27 with mention of fear and the Lord as the 'stronghold' of the psalmist's life makes this a good accompaniment to the story of Abraham in Genesis 15. However, the psalm shifts in its course from one of trust in vv. 1-6 to a lament or complaint in vv. 7-12. The two parts are nevertheless held together by several unifying elements: the words 'salvation', vv. 1, 9; 'adversaries', vv. 2, 12; 'heart', vv. 3, 8, 14; 'seek', vv. 4, 8; 'hide', vv. 5, 9; 'rise', vv. 3, 12; and 'life', vv. 4, 13; and vv. 1 and 14 also form a frame around the psalm with the word 'Lord' used twice in each verse. The scholar James L. Mays makes a number of points about trust in this psalm. First, there is a close relation between trust and need as the combination of the statement of trust in vv. 1-6 with the lament in vv. 7-14 indicates. Trust is most active when need is apparent. On the other hand, words of need and pleas for help arise from trust. Secondly, in v. 4 we see that trust is strengthened by worship. Worship is the foundation of trust and the place where it grows. Finally, in the psalm the opposite of trust in God is fear of humans. The place of worship is where truth is spoken. And worship is the occasion when it is declared over against the falsehood of the 'enemies' of truth. Worship enables one to contemplate this and assert it in one's life.

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

² ***When the wicked advance against me
to devour,
it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.***

³ Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.

⁴ ***One thing I ask from the LORD,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.***

⁵ For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.

⁶ ***Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;***

***at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the LORD.***

⁷ Hear my voice when I call, LORD;
be merciful to me and answer me.

⁸ ***My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, LORD, I will seek.***

⁹ Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.

Do not reject me or forsake me,
God my Saviour.

¹⁰ ***Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me.***

¹¹ Teach me your way, LORD;
lead me in a straight path
because of my oppressors.

¹² ***Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes,
for false witnesses rise up against me,
spouting malicious accusations.***

¹³ I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ ***Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.***

Philippians 3:14-4:1 (J.B. Phillips New Testament)

Few of us would advise our congregations that they should imitate us, as Paul does here! It would break too many of our cultural norms. We would find ourselves entering the confused world of being seen to over value ourselves. We would also be rather hesitant knowing our own limitations and failures. Yet there is something healthy about the way Paul is 'up front' about it all. He seems quite unconfused by the issues. He wants others to share his commitment, to follow the way he is going. So, what is his way? In the reading, we hear of two issues. Paul refers to people in the community who "are heading for utter destruction—their god is their own appetite, their pride is in what they should be ashamed of, and this world is the limit of their horizon." The reference to "appetite" is not about greed abut about their obsession with the Jewish food laws which were deemed by the conservatives/traditionalists to be central to Christian identity and custom. The other issue, about "their pride in what the should be ashamed of", is typical Jewish understatement, concerning circumcision and the male preoccupation with male genitals. In both, there is a literalist, fundamentalist spirit, with which Paul does battle. In his following statement, that "we are citizens of heaven", he

is appealing to the theological and ethical imagination of these people, so that they may move beyond their childish approach to things.

¹²⁻¹⁴ Yet, my brothers, I do not consider myself to have “arrived”, spiritually, nor do I consider myself already perfect. But I keep going on, grasping ever more firmly that purpose for which Christ grasped me. My brothers, I do not consider myself to have fully grasped it even now. But I do concentrate on this: I leave the past behind and with hands outstretched to whatever lies ahead I go straight for the goal—my reward the honour of being called by God in Christ.

My ambition is the true goal of the spiritually adult: make it yours

¹⁵⁻¹⁶ All of us who are spiritually adult should set ourselves this sort of ambition, and if at present you cannot see this, yet you will find that this is the attitude which God is leading you to adopt. It is important that we go forward in the light of such truth as we have ourselves attained to.

¹⁷⁻²¹ Let me be your example here, my brothers: let my example be the standard by which you can tell who are the genuine Christians among those about you. For there are many, of whom I have told you before and tell you again now, even with tears, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. These men are heading for utter destruction—their god is their own appetite, their pride is in what they should be ashamed of, and this world is the limit of their horizon. But we are citizens of Heaven; our outlook goes beyond this world to the hopeful expectation of the saviour who will come from Heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will re-make these wretched bodies of ours to resemble his own glorious body, by that power of his which makes him the master of everything that is.

4 So, my brothers whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, do stand firmly in the Lord, and remember how much I love you.

The word of the Lord'

Thanks be to God

Luke 13:31-35 (J.B. Phillips New Testament)

Lara Pillai

Danger! Herod Antipas had killed John the Baptist. It is very believable that he also wanted to remove Jesus. Why? The eastern flank of the Roman empire was unstable. When you are trying to maintain stability and security, the last thing you want is popular movements critical of government. If you are running the temple and trying to sustain a balance between Roman demands and your commitment to the survival of Israel and its faith, then you also do not want people from 'left field'. Military revolutionaries are more easily categorised. People like John and Jesus brought unrest.

³¹ Just then some Pharisees arrived to tell him, “You must get right away from here, for Herod intends to kill you.”

³²⁻³³ “Go and tell that fox,” returned Jesus, “today and tomorrow I am expelling evil spirits and continuing my work of healing, and on the third day my work will be finished. But I must journey on today, tomorrow, and the next day, for it would never do for a prophet to meet his death outside Jerusalem!

³⁴⁻³⁵ “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you murder the prophets and stone the messengers that are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children round me like a bird gathering her brood together under her wings, but you would never have it. Now, all that is left is yourselves, and your house. For I tell you that you will never see me again till the day when you cry, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: She sits like a bird (TiS 418, Thainaky, John Bell & Graham Maule)

**Some thoughts...Waiting...Penetrating Religious Rhetoric
Let's Give**

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Seng Eng Low

The one who prays ends each petition with the words, "May we wait, so to see more clearly". The response of the community, "So we may live more honestly".

Song: When love is found (TIS 654, O Waly, Waly, Brian Wren)

Blessing

May we wait, seeing everything with new eyes,
May we discern the spirits within us and among us
And channel our desire for *Christ's* purposes

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen

Closing Musical Meditation: May the feet of God (TiS 779, Aubrey, Aubrey Podlich)

Closing Postlude

Organist:

John Hughes